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SUBJECT: PROMINENT JOURNALISTS CONTINUE HUNGER STRIKE TO
PROTEST AZADLIQ EDITOR'S DETENTION

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11. (SBU) On December 13, Poloff visited the Yeni Musavat newspaper office, where a number of prominent editors and journalists have been staging a hunger strike to draw attention to the case of detained opposition Azadliq newspaper Editor-In-Chief Ganimat Zahid. Hunger strikers include Yeni Musavat newspaper Editor-In-Chief Rauf Arifoglu and correspondent Elshad Mammadli; Gundelik Azerbaijan newspaper editor Uzeyir Jafarov and correspondent Habil Valiyev; Realny Azerbaijan newspaper editor Shahvalad Chobanoglu; and 24-Saat newspaper Editor-In-Chief Faramazoglu. Yeni Musavat newspaper correspondent Aytan Hasanova had participated in the hunger strike for three days, but stopped when she began to feel sick. Arifoglu told Poloff that he had not eaten for four days, and was beginning to feel sick; he was contemplating ceasing the strike the following day. The group said everyone was regularly drinking water, and that all involved planned to stop if their conditions became serious.

12. (SBU) The group explained that their hunger strike was not intended to draw attention to them, but to Zahid, who has been in pre-trial detention since November 10, when the Yasamal district court ruled that Zahid would remain in detention while charges of hooliganism and inflicting minor bodily harm were investigated (reftels). Zahid reportedly has been on hunger strike in detention for six days, and has told the press that he will continue "to his death." The group said that they were worried Zahid would take the action too far, as he had previously staged a ten-day hunger strike which reportedly left him in a critical state. They requested the Embassy's continued attention to Zahid's case, and to the media situation in general, which they said has become "intolerable." We will continue to monitor the hunger strike, and have requested GOAJ authorization to visit Zahid in detention. We will report further developments.
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